Mills Faces Expulsion by Ark. Masons

By Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

Rep. Wilbur D. Mills (D-Ark.), whose escapades with stripper Fanne Foxe became the talk of the nation 10 months ago, will be hauled before his Masonic lodge Aug. 22 to answer for his misconduct.

The recuperating Mills, once a power in the House, now a forlorn figure, will be tried by a five-man commission at his home lodge in Kensett, Ark.

Just as his name was fading from the headlines, he must now face new notoriety. He could be expelled in disgrace from the fraternity. This would be a bitter blow to Mills, a 33d degree Mason, who was awarded the Grand Lodge Medal of Honor for bringing credit and glory to Masonry.

Mills told us he would fight the charges if the fraternity goes ahead with a formal trial. If all Masons were expelled who have a drinking problem, he added bitterly, the fraternity would lose half its membership.

Sources familiar with the preparations say the trial is set. The grand master, Lee Overstreet of Texarkana, Ark., is determined to expel Mills, they say.

Overstreet is described as a stern leader who is determined to clean up Masonry and discipline the wrongdoers. Only if Mills is contrite and confessional, our sources say, can he expect any leniency.

Overstreet refused to discuss the Mills case with us because, he said, "I am involved."

The embattled Mills said he would contend, in his own defense, that his alcoholism was a sickness that required treatment, not punishment.

A degenerative disc in his back, he said, had started causing him excruciating pain two years ago. Although surgery repaired the disc, he continued to suffer severe attacks of pain.

He took painkilling drugs which were "addictive," he said. He also began to drink. The combination led to his erratic behavior with the striptease star.

In the early hours of Oct. 7 Fanne Foxe, otherwise known as the Argentine Firecracker, clawed Mills' face, bolted from his Mark IV Continental and leaped into Washington's Tidal Basin.

The squalid publicity didn't deter him a month later from making a surprising appearance on the stage of a Boston burlesque theater to plant a kiss upon the Argentine Firecracker. "This won't ruin me," he boasted erroneously.

Not long afterwards, he checked into a Washington hospital with "complete mental and physical exhaustion." He subsequently confessed at a press conference that he was an alcoholic.

He now attends Alcoholic Anonymous meetings every night. "I feel remarkably well," he said. He believes he will be rehabilitated and able to return to his congressional chores in September. But he will never go back to the work schedule of the past, which wore him out, rubbed his nerves raw and caused him to reach for the bottle.

He had been apprehensive at first, he said, about the attitude of his congressional colleagues. But he is now at ease with them. "They have been exceedingly cordial," he said.

Has he heard from the Argentine Firecracker? Not since his breakdown, he said.

CIA Echoes—Vice President Rockefeller produced a Central Intelligence Agency study that was inconclusive. The House investigation of the CIA is floundering. Only the able, articulate Sen Frank Church (D-Idaho) has managed to keep the CIA on the griddle.

Yet behind his back, his investigators are bickering. The committee's four task forces constantly spat with one another. The staff attorneys mistrust the professors. The outside experts mistrust the insiders who were once on the payrolls of the intelligence agencies.

There is also tension between the ivory tower staff members who take the gee-whiz approach and the former criminal investigators who are more pragmatic.

Some staff members complain that Church will never be able to complete the investigation by his end-of-February deadline. It is impossible to undo 20 years of congressional neglect of the CIA, FBI and other intelligence agencies in seven more months, they contend. A responsible investigation would take at least two years, possibly five years, by their estimates.

A spokesman suggested the permanent oversight committee could follow up the findings of the Church committee. The final report itself, he added, will be the best rebuttal to other criticisms.

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